

MEN'S DIGEST

VOLUME ONE

NUMBER THREE

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Credits: Cover photo by Andre de Dienes; pages 4, 5, 6, 7 and 9 by Fred Slater; page 25 by Bernard of Hollywood; 26 by Keith Bernard; 28 by William Graham; 31, Hogarth print, courtesy of Spivey Levi; 33 by Edmund Lela; 42 and 43 by Walter Clehon, Allied Candid Photos, Chicago, through cooperation with Patti Counts, London House, Chicago; pages 52, 53, 54 and 55 by Andre de Dienes; 62 by Walter Clehon.

The French Bachelor

wherein

it is once again

proven that

even the sturdiest

cathode inversion

circuit

will not withstand

a female's

positive charge . . .

It is in the O'Hare household that I first come upon these two women. There is Alisa whose hair is the color of flax and her sister Moira whose hair has blackness like many of the Paris girls.

I am Henri de Tyard from that part of France which is near to Limoges and all I have in mind when I come to this country is to be an Electrical Engineer.

I attend this party which is given for the foreign students in the university and of the thirty or forty people who are present, I am the only Frenchman.

I sit in the corner enjoying the simplicity of a cup of coffee when Alisa O'Hare approaches me. We exchange names and I try to make conversation merely of how I enjoy the party and how good it is of the O'Hares to invite me, but there is a boldness in her eyes that makes me feel uneasy.

"I just adore Frenchmen," she says.

"Thank you, Mademoiselle," I say.

"You must have been hiding yourself," she says. "I've never seen you on the campus."

"Not at all, Mademoiselle," I say.

"It is but that I occupy myself with

Fiction

BY JACK RITCHIE

my studies and this consumes my time."

She smiles slowly as she studies me. I ask quickly, "How is the tax situation here?"

"Henri," she says. "Come into a less bright place and talk to me."

"But Mademoiselle," I say. "I have not yet finished my sandwich."

This is the moment that Moira, the younger of the O'Hare sisters, comes to see what amusement her sister is up to.

"What have you got there, Alisa?" she asks.

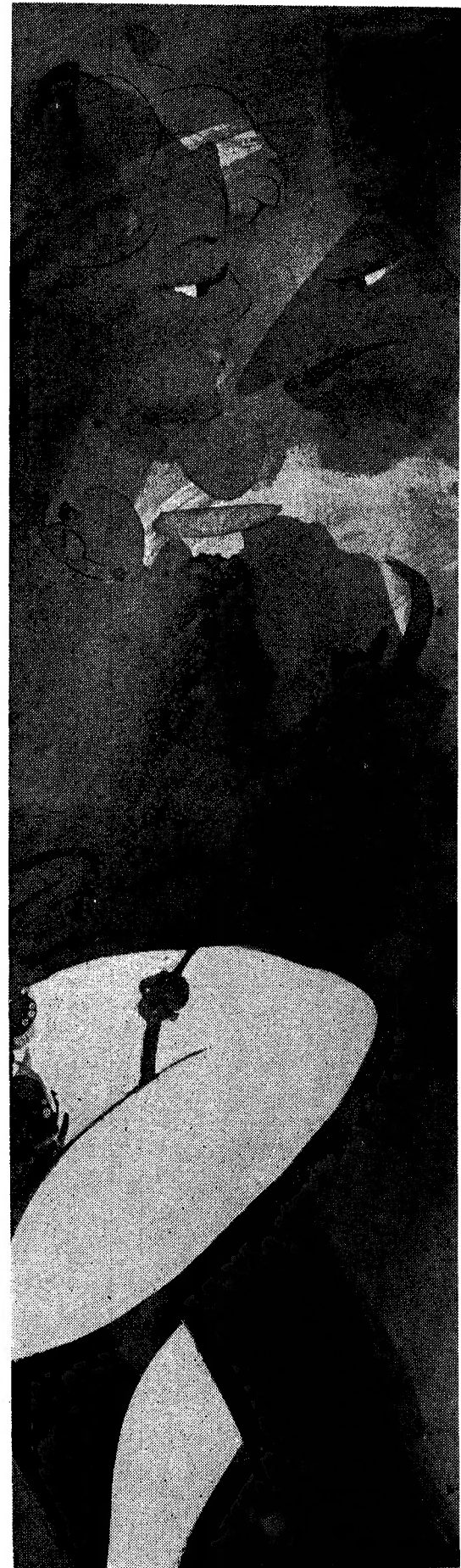
"Run along, little sister," Alisa says. "This is claimed and homesteaded."

"I'll trade you two East Indians, one Dane, and Freddy," Moira says. She smiles greatly at me, "Hi!"

"Hi to you also," I say. "Is not the weather remarkably warm or cold for this time of the year, as the case may be?"

A young man with brown hair who looks like he will go to sleep if someone has the kindness to suggest it, comes behind them and looks over their shoulders.

"This is Freddy Fowler," Alisa says. "He's from England and he's decided to be passionately in love with which



ever one of us will allow it. Moira and I are still tossing coins."

"Terrible strain," Freddy says. "Holding back like that."

"Let's take a walk in the garden where it's less crowded," Alisa says to me. "Do they have moonlight in France?"

"Not at this time of the year." I look at my watch obviously. "What a coincidence. This is the very moment when I must leave."

"I'll go with you to the door so you won't be lonely," Alisa says. "I think I know where it is."

If she does, she has taken the long way. When we arrive at the exit, she has gotten to the place where her arm is on mine, and something soft and warm is pushing into it. We stand in the doorway and she looks up at me with a faint smile and eyes half shut.

"I'm anxious to know just how a Frenchman says goodnight," Alisa says.

It is with intense relief that I notice a taxi come into the street. "It is my vehicle," I say. "I recognize the route number." I break away and dash for the taxi, shouting for attention.

The next day I see Freddy Fowler in the school hall and I learn that he too is of the School of Engineering, but Mechanical.

"You made some kind of an impression on them," he says. He leans against the wall of the corridor to support his drowsiness. "I'm supposed to look you up and invite you again."

"I am impossible to be found," I say.

He scratches his head very slowly and his eyes have worked up a curiosity. "You're absolutely positive you're a Frenchman?"

"But certainly. However my uncle in Bordeaux has a wife who is American from his university days. When he smokes, he must smoke in the garage."

I examine him in return. "I am puzzled with you too. You are holding in abeyance your passion until you know to whom it may be directed."

He grins in a small way. "Not quite. I've made my selection, but I'm waiting for an appropriate moment to extend my heart."

As I leave the university at the close of the day and am walking down the street, Alisa stops beside me with a gigantic automobile.

"Hop in," she says. "Either that or I complain to the French Consul."

I sit in beside her and there is much perfume in the car to resist. "It is so nice of you to give me an assistance to my quarters," I say. "You Americans are most generous."

"Aren't we though," she says. Her glance for me has a sly quality that I do not grasp in time. "I'll bet you're a terrible dancer."

"Mademoiselle," I say stiffly. "I am a wonderful dancer."

"Lovely," she says. "That settles it and we're off to the Mocambo for dinner and dancing."

It is no use for me to demur. She allows me to stop at my lodgings for a change to more appropriate clothing and it is a short matter before we are at this Mocambo.

She sees that I am never lacking for champagne, but it is of course useless since I am a Frenchman and I remain in possession of myself.

After a while she says, "Usually at this time my escort tells me how devastatingly beautiful I am."

I do not need to look at her to be reminded that she is devastatingly beautiful, but I do look and she has a smile with ideas in it that makes the room warm for me. "I am determined to become an Electrical Engineer," I say hastily.

"How adorable," she says. "Let me be your little power plant."

I search for a topic that has neutrality. "This Freddy is a nice gentleman, no?"

"You have gray eyes," she says. "I'm partial to gray eyes in a man."

"Mademoiselle," I say. "Let us dance. Immediately!"

It is a duel through the whole evening. Many times I am nearly pinked, but I keep her at her distance. When I at last arrive home, I am unmarked, but exhausted. Nevertheless I am somewhat proud of myself, for what man of flesh and blood has ever been so resistant?

The next day, after my classes, I put my eye to the window of the door before I leave and my caution is rewarded. Alisa is there near the entrance waiting for me.

I smile to myself as I retreat to the rear of the building for my exit, but alas! It is there I run into Moira who is accidentally passing by.

"Hi there!" she says.

"Hi, again," I retort. She matches my steps to the end of the alley. "I'll bet you're a terrible dancer," she says.

I will not be caught again. "Mademoiselle," I say. "You are correct. I am a lousy dancer."

"Good," she says. "I can hardly dance myself. Then you won't mind if we just have dinner and then take in a play."

What is there to say? What is there to do?

And then I am nearly starved for she must go to six restaurants before she can find one that serves frogs' legs. I am aware that many people eat them with enjoyment, but to me the idea does not encourage the appetite.

We arrive at last to the play in time to see the third act. When it is over she asks me what I think of the play. How should I know what I think when I have seen only the last act and have frogs' legs in my stomach?

Later, when we reach her car I sit away from her as far as possible. She too has a perfume that has suggestions of utmost subtleness.

She puts her elbow on the back of the seat and gazes at me. Her violet eyes in the dimness have a sparkle in them that is totally disconcerting.

"It has been a fine evening," I say. "And now if you will start the auto-

mobile?"

"Are you afraid of me?" she asks.

"Mademoiselle," I say. "I am merely a French bachelor attempting to be an engineer."

"But I'm perfectly harmless. Can't you tell that by looking at me? Hardly any muscles at all."

"No woman is harmless. My uncle in Bordeaux has warned me of this. But even if he had not, I am certain I would have guessed." I look at her. It is true that she does not have muscles. But what she does have more than makes up for this.

She turns on the motor of the car. "I'm going to take you home and show you to father."

"But you cannot," I say. "Presenting one to one's parents would mean that we are nearly almost engaged."

"Oh, Henri, nothing of the kind. Father may loosen you up a little. You're so serious."

I have the thought to throw myself out of the car, but by this time we are traveling at great speed and I would ruin my clothes and very likely myself. We arrive swiftly at the O'Hare household and I am pulled through many rooms before we discover Mr. O'Hare practicing at billiards.

Mr. O'Hare is a man of solidness and he has a cigar in his mouth.

"Daddy," Moira says. "May I present Monsieur Henri de Tyard?"

"I am a foreigner," I say. "I hope you are from the Mid-West."

He looks up momentarily and then resumes studying his next shot. "French?"

"We have never repaid our war debt," I announce. "And we have no intention of ever doing so."

"How do you like him, Daddy?" Moira asks.

"Pretty big and husky for a Frenchman," he says.

"If I should marry your daughter," I say, "I will need thirty polo ponies and they must all be white, too."

Mr. O'Hare chalks his cue. "For

some reason I've always liked the French," he says. "A fine people."

"I must also pay my many gambling debts before marriage," I say. "One million francs or possibly two."

"Dropped a couple hundred in a poker game myself last night," he says. "Darndest luck you ever saw." He attempts his shot and misses it.

I close my eyes for a moment. "Mr. O'Hare," I say. "You are one gosh awful billiard player."

Mr. O'Hare looks at me and finally regrets the Marshall Plan. "I know," he agrees sarcastically. "That's why I'm practicing."

This merry-go-round with Alisa and Moira goes on for weeks.

I come finally to the conclusion that this cannot continue for I am losing much sleep and I am tiring. I make the determination to have a showdown.

The O'Hare sisters have another of their parties and it is natural to them that I must attend. There are forty people at the affair and Freddy Fowler and Mr. O'Hare are among them.

When Alisa and Moira discover me, I take a drink from a waiter and diminish it to the bottom of the glass.

Then I halt their talking with an impervious hand. "Mesdemoiselles," I say. "This can not continue. It is my purpose to become an Electrical Engineer without interruption and you have made me nearly fail my test on cathode phase inversion circuits. Therefore, painful though it may be, I must bid you 'adieu' and return to my studies."

There is an interval of silence while they assimilate my words and then Alisa brings a handkerchief to her eyes. "Very well, Henri," she says. "But before you go, you must at least kiss me. You've been avoiding it, you know."

I can afford to be generous since it is a parting. "As you desire," I say.

She folds her arms around me and kisses me with great warmth. I hear Freddy Fowler cough in the background and so I push her away. "Is this the one?" I ask.

"Yes," he says. "That's the one."

"Freddy," I say. "It is because you are English that I ask this question. Have you ever kissed Alisa?"

A great deal of redness comes into his face. "No, old boy, I say!"

"That is the trouble with you Englishmen. You say, but you do not do." I look at him sternly. "There is nothing to fear. You have the British Empire behind you, including the Commonwealths."

It is as though he has heard a bugle. He straightens his shoulders and approaches Alisa with single-mindedness.

By English standards, the kiss is commendable.

"Why, Freddy," Alisa says after a while. "I didn't think you could."

"Frankly, I didn't either," he says and he does not look at all sleepy. He leads a shocked Alisa away.

Then, Moira turns to me and says: "Henri, I sympathize with your aspirations and will try and respect them from this point on. Now . . . as for my goodbye kiss . . . I'd like to take it in a kind of installment Care package . . ."

It is three thirty-two A.M. when I return to my quarters. I know that I shall cut classes this day. I know that I shall also probably obtain no better than a D plus in my retest on cathode phase inversion circuits three days hence. But I have come to the conclusion that this is not altogether catastrophic. It is something intangible, something I cannot yet quite put my finger upon, yet I am led to feel that there is more to life than electricity. Or rather, that there is more to electricity than engineering. I must be sure to ask my uncle about this, if and when I ever return to Bordeaux. ☆